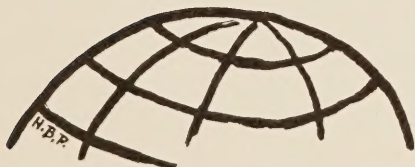
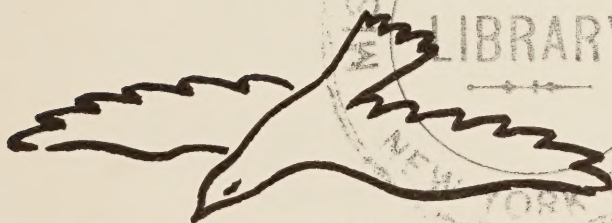


A SELF-SUPPORTING MINISTRY
AND
THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

By

A Group of Sixty
Bishops, Other Clergy and Lay People
of the Episcopal Church



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A SELF-SUPPORTING MINISTRY AND THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

The Findings of the Seabury House Conference
on a Self-supporting Ordained Ministry
February 21-23, 1964

In recent years, in many parts of the Christian Church, there has been an increasingly articulate interest in a self-supporting or non-stipendiary ministry--that is to say, in the ordination of deacons and priests who may earn their livelihood by engaging in other professions and occupations--both as a missionary arm of the Church and as a supplement to the pastoral ministry.

In response to this interest, and in an attempt to seek answers to concrete questions that have been asked in many quarters, a conference was assembled at Seabury House, Greenwich, Connecticut, February 21-23, 1964, which consisted of thirty-three clergymen and eight lay people from a wide variety of backgrounds, all of whom have had some interest or involvement in this topic. In addition to those actually present, several bishops and other clergymen have co-operated in the planning of this meeting and have wished to associate themselves with its conclusions.

This conference has seen itself as attempting to act in the light of two important, but hitherto neglected, Resolutions of the Lambeth Conference of 1958:

The Office of the Deacon

88. The Conference recommends that each province of the Anglican Communion shall consider whether the office of Deacon shall be restored to its primitive place as a distinct order of the Church, instead of being regarded as a probationary period for the priesthood.

The Supplementary Ministry

89. The Conference considers that, while the fully-trained and full-time priesthood is essential to the continuing

life of the Church, there is no theological principle which forbids a suitable man from being ordained priest while continuing in his lay occupation. While calling attention to Resolution 65 of the Lambeth Conference of 1930, the Conference now wishes to go further and to encourage provinces to make provisions on these lines in cases where conditions make it desirable. Such provision is not to be regarded as a substitute for the full-time ministry of the Church, but as an addition to it.

(The Lambeth Conference 1958, pp. 1.50-.51)

These Resolutions provide a direct mandate for the consideration of these topics, and the members of the Seabury House Conference have addressed themselves to them in the hope that their conclusions may be of use, not only to their own respective jurisdictions and fields of work, but also to the Church at large. In view of the serious concern about these matters in several other Christian bodies, it is believed that these conclusions may also be of ecumenical interest.

I. The Theological Basis for New Patterns in the Ministry

From a theological point of view, there are many searching questions that need to be asked regarding the role of the ordained, both in the Church and in the world today. This has not seemed to be the place, however, to treat exhaustively the purely theological and historical aspects of the matter. These have, in fact, been discussed in various other gatherings, and a considerable literature has grown up about this topic during the past several decades. In respect of the literature, we call attention to the bibliography attached to this statement. With regard to the gatherings, we mention particularly the consultation held at St. Catherine's, Ontario, August 26-28, 1963, under the joint sponsorship of the Missionary Society of the Anglican Church of Canada and of the Overseas Mission Society, and also to the meeting of the Advisory Council of the Division of Christian Ministries held at Chicago, November 15-17, 1963.

At the same time, this present conference feels it necessary to register its theological concern. The Church is called to serve in the ministry of her Lord. The Body of Christ has many members, called to a variety of functions, both within and without the ordained ministry.

The complexity of modern life and the rapid change of conditions in all parts of the world demand the utmost flexibility and resourcefulness on the part of the Church. This again applies to the total ministry of the Church, ordained and unordained. Non-stipendiary clergy can only make their full contribution when they have the partnership and the co-operation of committed laypeople. The ordained ministry, whether paid or unpaid, must never be seen as a substitute for, or alternative to, the constant ministry of the whole Body.

Secondly, a non-stipendiary ordained ministry must always be seen in the context of the Church's Mission. We could not look with favor on a proposal to use unpaid clergy merely as a less expensive means of conserving the Church's present program in situations where, in the judgment of the ecclesiastical authority, the well-being of the Church requires a full pastoral ministry. Quite the contrary, we see clergy who have a variety of backgrounds and a variety of professional occupations as a means of extending the Church's official commitment into an ever wider circle. At the same time, by substantially increasing the ordained manpower at the Church's disposal, the availability of supplementary ministers often permits the more advantageous deployment of salaried personnel. The further conclusions and recommendations of this Conference must thus all be seen in the context of a strong emphasis both on the mission of the Church and on the responsibility of the entire laity.

II. A Self-Supporting Priesthood

Under this heading we would make certain suggestions and recommendations about what have been variously described as supplemental ministers, voluntary or non-stipendiary clergy, or worker-priests. We do not regard this terminology as a matter of special importance, nor do we find that any one of these terms adequately describes the wide range of ministries which such men are actually now fulfilling in our Church, or may fulfill in the future. We cannot accede, however, to the use of the term "part-time ministry." All ordained clergy are men in Orders at all times, irrespective of how they earn their livings.

(a) Taking the Lambeth Resolutions in reverse order, we would first call attention to the question of the conditions which make such a ministry desirable. Within what may be described as a normal parish a man, from time to time, may have a vocation to the ordained ministry while remaining in his previous profession or occupation. At the present time, such men are apt to be exceptional; and, in order for their ministry

to be most useful, their distinctive talents and capabilities must be separately considered in each instance.

When we step outside the range of what may be described as the normal parish, we find a drastically different situation. Just as non-Christian peoples throughout the world are today expanding more rapidly than the Christian, so within our own country we see the rapid expansion of areas of the population with which the Church is not effectively in touch. Here we see urgent need for a radical re-appraisal of the Church's strategy. Such areas may be geographic, sociological, ethnic, or occupational. As illustrations we may mention a few instances:

1. In thousands of rural towns and villages, as may be dramatically seen in West Virginia and western Pennsylvania, both the population and the economy are declining, and the people find it impossible to support a normal Episcopal parochial structure. In dioceses where many such communities exist, the diocese itself cannot raise the funds to maintain salaried clergy in all these positions. Yet people in declining communities are in urgent need of the ministry of Word and Sacrament. The withdrawal of other Churches, furthermore, sometimes actually leaves to our Church the responsibility for expanding in such situations.

2. Paradoxically, a similar situation is becoming normal in urban areas. The centers of our larger cities are becoming thickly populated with people of meager financial resources. Limited education and narrowing opportunities of employment presage greater difficulties in the future. At the same time, in the field of politics, civil rights, folk religious movements, and the fine arts, we see that these urban concentrations are able to produce dedicated and responsible leadership which our Church can no longer ignore.

3. Or, we may consider certain American Indian communities among whom our Church has maintained for many years a well-established work with a large following. Yet in some of these groups, in certain areas, we find not a single Indian priest, only white missionaries who are not fluent in the community's language. In many cases in the Indian field, there are so few clergy that even the most devoted and efficient priest is overwhelmed by the multitude of duties.

4. Among special occupational groups, we may call attention to the several dozen Episcopal clergy who carry on their daily work in the fields

of technology, science, and scholarship. An ordinary theological education would not have prepared them for such positions, and a salary from the Church would in several cases impair their witness to their colleagues in the academic world.

These illustrations are sufficient to indicate the wide range of situations in which there is an urgent need for the Church to extend its ministrations, but within which it is necessary to have clergy whose backgrounds, professional roles, and means of livelihood differ widely from those of the conventional rector, vicar, or salaried curate. For the Church to ignore the problems and opportunities posed by these special circumstances would be irresponsible.

(b) In areas and situations where a supplemental ministry is desirable, how are suitable men to be attracted to it? In ordinary circumstances, bishops and priests should from time to time challenge men to respond to a vocation to the sacred ministry. Although the decision to respond is an individual one, such a challenge often has its effects. In missionary situations, and in areas where the Church is under stress, experience indicates that the problem is not usually so great. Under such circumstances, leaders become evident. We call attention in particular to the many lay readers who have for so many years been, in effect, the pastors of small congregations. When an experienced churchman is respected as a leader in the local community, and at the same time manifests genuine pastoral ability within the Church, such an individual does in fact show important signs of vocation. Where viable arrangements can be presented for training and ordaining such a man, while keeping him within the context of the particular community where he has proved effective, such a man can often be encouraged to seek Holy Orders. In fact, the present Canon on Lay Readers, in specifying the normal standard of learning required for lay readers who are to be licensed for pastoral charge, has set forth a standard which does not vary greatly from that required of candidates for the diaconate.

(c) The training of men for new patterns of ministry is a matter of utmost importance. Most men entering such work do not (and perhaps should not) receive training from our seminaries. This conference calls attention to the fact that the many new missionary frontiers facing the Church today require many types of clergy whose outlook and background may need to be quite different from that of the customary clerical pattern. In certain specific areas, the vocabulary, manners, and cultural formation

of the traditional Anglican clergyman are a positive handicap to effective evangelistic and pastoral work. It is precisely on such frontiers that non-stipendiary clergy from the local community are particularly needed. We therefore commend efforts to give such men distinctive kinds of training. In particular, they should be able to bear witness and build pastoral relationships without dependence on traditional clerical titles and prerogatives. They should know how to conduct services and administer the sacraments with dignity and reverence even in places where ecclesiastical buildings and traditional liturgical furnishings are not at hand. And they should be able to expound the Gospel in simple terms out of their own experiences.

It is our opinion that Canon 26, Sec. 5; Canon 29, Sec. 2; and Canon 32 provide latitude for such training, although greater flexibility might be considered in the future on the basis of actual experience.

It has been demonstrated in the Dioceses of Michigan and West Virginia, and elsewhere, that it is possible for a diocesan school to train postulants and candidates for the ordained ministry very effectively while the school is simultaneously engaged in training lay men and women for more responsible leadership. Ability to work with lay associates, as well as with fellow clergy, is of cardinal importance for non-stipendiary clergy.

(d) The financial relationship between auxiliary ministers and the Church must be kept clear. Since the provisions of the Church Pension Fund will not usually be of great benefit to such men, it is important to ascertain that these postulants have Social Security or other suitable retirement and insurance coverage. In the case of perpetual deacons exclusion from the fund is specified by Canon 34, Sec. 10 d. A similar exclusion for priests would require the amendment of the Canons. In some cases parishes have given to such men a "nominal" remuneration simply by paying in their behalf the assessments on the hypothetical basis provided in the present Rules of the Pension Fund. In some situations further remuneration of auxiliary clergy may be desirable. In the academic field it has long been recognized that a clergyman might properly receive a salary as a teacher during the week and also receive a small stipend for ecclesiastical work on the weekends. Similar arrangements may also prove satisfactory in some other occupational fields. Such a possibility deserves serious consideration in areas where the economy is declining and there is not adequate opportunity for secular employment.

(e) Supplemental ministers require suitable assignment and supervision after ordination. The area of a man's ministry should normally be approximately the same as that in which other aspects of his life take place. In some places the geographic area will be of primary concern; in other cases a man may be principally responsible for a certain occupational or sociological group. In any case, there should be an authentic relationship between one's ministry and one's daily work. Too wide a cleavage between the two will lead to frustration and serious discontent. The area within which self-supporting clergy are licensed to act should be clearly understood. In all cases, a senior priest, or the bishop himself, should be responsible for maintaining a close pastoral relationship with these clergy.

The conference feels very strongly that every self-supporting minister must have a regular and canonical relationship with a worshipping community, with reasonable provision for the exercise of his proper ministry therein. The courtesy and brotherly cooperation of other clergy is a matter of great importance. We call attention to the value of having periodical meetings of the clergy during which the supplemental ministers of a diocese can share their experiences with their brethren, receive help with their problems, and deepen their sense of commitment to the Church's mission. Separate meetings of the auxiliary clergy by themselves might also prove helpful. On the one hand, the diocese must provide a living recognition that such men are a part of the clerical fellowship; on the other hand, care must be taken not to withdraw or disaffect these men from the particular context or local community in which their respective witness is most effective.

(f) Mention was made by several persons at the conference of the need for graceful and honorable "exits" from the sacred ministry. An examination of the Canons, and especially of Canon 60, reveals that provision is already made for a clergyman to lay down the responsibilities and prerogatives of his order, and, after proper safeguards and the passage of a decent interval of time (all designed to protect the petitioning clergyman) to be removed from the roll of clergy and relieved of his obligations. It is unfortunate that the Recorder of Ordinations (The Church Pension Fund), in its triennial publication, The Clerical Directory, The Episcopal Church Annual, and the Church press, follow the practice of lumping all such resignations (the technical canonical term is "Renunciation of the Ministry"), together with removals resulting from disciplinary action, under the single heading of "Depositions." No saving clause that the renunciation "is voluntary and for causes ... which do not affect his moral character" is really accepted at face value. However, this would appear to be an administrative problem: It needs only that the proper

authorities and news media carefully distinguish between "Renunciations" or "Resignations," and "Depositions." It was recognized that changed conditions (e.g., the transfer of the minister by his employer to a community already well served by the Church) might result in a minister's services being unused for a period of time. It was strongly voiced, however, that a man's priesthood does not atrophy merely because he is not licensed to exercise that priesthood, and such changed circumstances ought not be the occasion of premature renunciations. It might be desirable to exclude such self-supporting ministers from the statistical base upon which a diocese's assessment for the expenses of the General Convention are computed.

III. The Permanent Diaconate

The restoration of the diaconate is an object of considerable interest in many parts of Christendom at the present time. The legal status of self-supporting deacons is clearly recognized and specified in Canon 34, Sec. 10. Much of what we have said in the previous paragraphs also applies to deacons. Nonetheless, this conference confesses to a division of opinion in regard to the proper role of this order. In some of our dioceses there is a readiness to consider the ordination of self-supporting clergy only with the priesthood in view. In other dioceses the self-supporting ministry is envisaged only in terms of the diaconate. In other words, a man who might be encouraged to study for the priesthood in one diocese would be obliged in another to commit himself to the permanent diaconate. It is only as the Church gains greater experience with self-supporting ministers in both orders that we can hope to resolve this question of the distinctive vocation of each.

(a) With deacons, as with priests, attention is called to the continuing responsibility of the Church in seeking and summoning suitable men for the sacred ministry. An effective diaconate cannot be successfully restored if it is only sought by a few exceptional individuals who put themselves forward, sometimes without having adequate regard for the actual needs of the Church. Such a situation has undoubtedly been a source of dissatisfaction in several dioceses. In view of the large numbers of mature and responsible men that undoubtedly exist in the Church, such situations need not occur.

(b) The question is frequently raised as to the status of a deacon in a parish when a change of rectorship occurs. This bears closely on the preceeding paragraph. If a deacon has been encouraged to seek ordination and has been trained under one priest alone, it is evident that some other priest might not feel such a person to be a desirable collaborator.

This difficulty can be largely removed if the congregation as a whole is given a larger role in the selection of a postulant. If a man is regarded by his fellow churchmen as the best qualified person for this ministry, and if the bishop has personally acquainted himself with the circumstances and concurred in the choice, then the desirability of the man's ministry is established on a more permanent basis. Secondly, in the course of his training he should be exposed to priests of varying views and temperaments. Where this has been done, deacons have shown themselves well able to adapt themselves to new rectors. Such ministerial continuity between rectorships can in fact mitigate the inexplicable and disruptive changes of policy which have occurred in some parishes. It remains true that a rector who can only exercise his ministry on an individualistic basis may not welcome the assistance of a local man who is not financially dependent upon him. The presence of a permanent deacon may well protect a parish against the arrival of such a rector.

(c) At the present time, over 180 men are serving in our Church as deacons ordained under Canon 34, Sec. 10. Most serve as assistant ministers in local parishes. They perform their liturgical functions, preach occasionally, and assist in some pastoral work. We call attention to the possibility of having certain deacons to serve the Church in various other ways. Opportunities exist, for instance, in the supervision of social service and welfare work, and in other phases of diocesan administration, which in some dioceses entail extensive responsibilities which the bishop and other clergy find difficult to fulfill. All such functions appear to fall clearly within the scope of diaconal duties as described in the New Testament and the Book of Common Prayer. Just as the existence of the ordained priesthood gives specific expression and focus to the priestly vocation of the whole Church, so the ordained diaconate could help the whole Church to regain a sense of its rightful "diakonia."

(d) An anomaly appears in the Canons which should be removed in any event. Canon 50, "Of Lay Readers," envisages situations in which a lay reader may have pastoral charge of a congregation (Section 2, paragraph 2); Canon 48, "Of Deacons," while prohibiting a deacon from being "Rector of a Parish or Congregation," does not prohibit him from being a minister-in-charge of a congregation, and, in fact, many so serve, prior to advancement to the priesthood; but Canon 34, "Of Ordination to the Diaconate," in Section 10 (c), specifies, "He (a Perpetual Deacon) may not in any respect act as Minister-in-charge of a congregation." Thus, it could happen that a mature man, a recognized leader in his community (who had served faithfully as a lay reader and had been assigned the pastoral charge

of the congregation in which he served), upon being called by the Church to receive ordination as a deacon, and offering himself, without intending to proceed to the priesthood, would have to relinquish his pastoral and/or administrative post, perhaps thus depriving that congregation of resident leadership.

(e) A serious, though elusive, problem of restoring the diaconate as a meaningful office in the Church is involved in the fact that it became vestigial long before the present constitutional government of the Church came into being. The Church today looks chiefly upon the deacon as a kind of apprentice priest, climaxing his ordination service with a prayer that he may "so well behave himself in this inferior office that he may be found worthy to be called into the higher ministries." Diocesan Canons vary widely as to the place of the deacon in the parish and the Diocesan Convention.

A deacon may not serve as a deputy to General Convention. Since it appears that any permanent diaconate foreseeable in the near future will be a non-professional one, it would seem that diocesan and general Canons should be revised to provide that deacons ordained under the provisions in Canon 34, Section 10 (a) -- the so-called "perpetual deacon" -- would have no ex officio position in governing bodies, but would be eligible to any position for which laymen are eligible--as vestryman, delegate to Diocesan Convention, deputy to General Convention, etc.

(f) It would be a mistake to separate the liturgical functions of the deacon--reading the Gospel, administering the chalice, and bidding the congregation to prayer--from the external tasks of searching for "the poor, sick, and impotent people of the parish, that they may be relieved with the alms of the parishioners," and the other requirements regarding vocation, character, and discipline specified in the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer. The liturgical actions he performs should be an expression of his total place in the life of the Church, not merely an isolated function he performs on Sundays to help the celebrant. The celebrant himself did not have hands laid on him just to make Christ come into the elements, but to be a "messenger, watchman, and steward of the Lord."

The priest breaks the family bread because he is a shepherd of the sheep whose duty it is (among other things) to feed them. The deacon does what he does because it expresses his daily relationship to the people of God. The usual question asked about the diaconate is, "What can a deacon do that a layman can't do?" But the true question about Holy Orders is, "How does what one does in the Eucharistic liturgy express

what one does outside that liturgy?" "What does a deacon do in the world that makes him the appropriate person to administer the chalice and read the Gospel in church?" Conversely, why does the Church withhold ordination from a man who has proved himself to be the appropriate person to perform this liturgy?

IV. Conclusions and Recommendations

(a) The Lambeth Conference of 1958 has called on the churches of the Anglican Communion to make provisions for non-stipendiary priests in cases where circumstances make this desirable. In our considered judgment, many such circumstances do exist both in the United States and in many areas of the Church overseas. We believe that such conditions will become more marked in the future. This is not a cause for regret; because in many instances these circumstances are typical of the most distinctive and challenging missionary opportunities of our time. Our present Canons do not forbid the exercise of the priesthood by men engaged in other occupations and professions, and a number of individuals are actively serving on this basis. Nonetheless, our present Canons make the entrance of such men into the order of priests unnecessarily and undesirably difficult. Accordingly, we recommend the consideration of canonical changes to provide specifically for this kind of ministry. In particular, we urge that men ordained for the non-stipendiary priesthood be given the option, with proper safeguards, of being excluded from the Church Pension Fund. Most important of all, this conference recommends that diocesan authorities take note of missionary situations in which such men might serve and urge suitable men to consider offering themselves for such service.

(b) The last Lambeth Conference has also recommended to all churches of the Anglican Communion the reconsidering of the office of deacon. In fact, a permanent diaconate is recognized and provided for in the Canons of the American Church, and many persons are already serving in this order. The present conference recommends first that responsible bodies explore the extension of the usefulness of this office into wider areas.

Secondly, we recommend the removing of the disabilities to which mature and experienced men entering the diaconate are now subject:

1. The prohibition against their having pastoral charge of a congregation.
2. Their ineligibility for election to representative church offices.

Thirdly, we call attention to the large number of basically qualified men available in the Church today who could be offered the opportunity of serving as deacons.

(c) Finally, this conference affirms its conviction that the Church is surrounded today with unique missionary opportunities both in America and in other lands, which cry out for new methods and new patterns of action. Because the ministry of Word and Sacraments is central to the life and witness of our Church, new approaches to the selection, training, and deployment of deacons and priests are of the utmost importance. These new approaches can only be implemented if the Church is willing to move more freely beyond the established pattern of existing stipendiary positions. There are critical new areas, new sections of the population and new circumstances which the Church is called upon to explore. This can only be done effectively if we are willing to entrust the ordained ministry to Christian leaders whose way of life and daily work are part of the fabric of these situations. We urge our fellow churchmen to take action in meeting these challenges which God has placed before us in this exciting era of Christian history.

We, whose names appear below, submit this statement to the bishops, other clergy, and lay people of the Church. Speaking as we do from many different positions and viewpoints, we are not all in equal agreement as to all positions of this document. We join, however, in commending these proposals to our fellow churchmen for their serious consideration.

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